

An Introduction to Literary Quranic Stylistics

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Abstract

A stylistic analysis is one approach of analyzing a literary text using literary descriptions. The use of literary texts in the literature classroom has been limited to mostly Western sources. This paper is an attempt to create an awareness of the linguistic features present in the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran. The Surah (chapters of the Quran) in the English translated versions of the Quran prove to contain a rich variety of linguistic features. Using the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran as literary texts for the teaching of literature in the English language, especially at Islamic institutions, and using the stylistics approach to analyze these texts in the Literature classroom is a new and creative contribution towards the pedagogy of English language teaching. This paper also seeks to discuss the aims of stylistics in relation to the study and the teaching of literature. Besides reading literature, one can gain considerable pleasure from analyzing literature. One enjoys reading literature because it is interesting, enjoyable and/or emotionally touching. This enjoyment can be brought about by reading. Although reading is an important step in the study of the literary texts, there is another more important step - to analyze the literary texts, which is, to struggle to explain how one comes to understand literary works.

An Introduction to Literary Quranic Stylistics

Stylistics is an area of study where the linguist combines with the critic so as to achieve a better or fuller understanding and appreciation of literature. Stylistics also exploits one's knowledge of the variety of linguistic features present in the literature to deepen one's awareness of the literature. According to Mick Short, stylistics is a linguistic approach to the study of literary texts (Short, 1996:334). In other words, stylistics is a tool that analyses literary texts using linguistic descriptions. In his book, *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose* (1996), Mick Short suggests the following language features to be examined for a stylistic analysis:

- i) foregrounded features, including figures of speech
- ii) whether any patterns of style variation can be discerned
- iii) discoursal patterning of various kinds, like turn-taking or patterns of inferencing
- iv) patterns of viewpoint manipulation, including speech and thought presentation
- v) patterns of lexis (vocabulary)
- vi) patterns of grammatical organization
- vii) patterns of textual organization (how the units of textual organization, from sentences to paragraphs and beyond are arranged).

Stylistics, predominantly, has been geared towards literary text description. It uses linguistic descriptions to analyze a literary text. When one reads, one wants to understand and respond to

the literary text through the language of the literary text. A stylistic analysis helps one to examine the language of the literary text. In the academic setting, as linguists work with literary texts by applying the principles of linguistic theory, more and more about literary language can be learnt.

Stylistics and the Study and the Teaching of Literature

Many students enjoy literature. To make any learning process reach an optimal level, enjoyment is a must. Thus, literary texts, if well-selected, can be a potentially useful aid to the language teacher.

Since stylistics is a linguistic approach to the study of literary texts, it actually combines language and literature. If a student is taught literature, literary texts or extracts from them can be used to break up language classes. Class discussions can be held to identify difficulties the students have in general and in reading the literary text.

In the academic setting, a reading class would have several aspects to consider. The first would be to select the text, then to develop interesting strategies for the reading process, after which the teacher has the task of dealing with the difficulties experienced by the students. As a whole, these steps are concerned with making a point of using literary texts for a discussion whenever possible during the reading process. There is a definite link between stylistics and the reading process when the language of the literary text is examined in detail.

Reading is an important skill to the study of literature. When the student enters a tertiary institution, there is an emphasis on learning the four language skills--reading, writing, listening and speaking--through instruction in language studies and students are encouraged to participate in activities designed to improve these skills.

Stylistics links language and literature studies. Literary texts often contain a number of different varieties of English. They can be extremely useful in sensitizing more advanced learners of English to linguistic variation. The study of stylistics would be of particular interest to undergraduate students interested in stylistic analysis and also be relevant to advanced students and researchers such as this writer.

Stylistics has its place in the study and the teaching of literature. This paper also deals with the stylistics approach to the study of literature and its relevance to the teaching of literature. Mick Short states "the practice of stylistics comes about at any point of intersection of the language of a text with the elements which constitute the literalness of the text" (Short, 1988, p. 162).

From a teaching or classroom viewpoint, there is much that can be done. The teacher can use the literary text to introduce and form the basis of teaching some structural features of the English language. The teacher can teach grammar in action and through a stylistics approach of analysis, its communicative features can be illustrated. This can be very beneficial when teaching both native and non-native learners of English.

Where lexis is concerned, stylistics is a way of exploring the literary meanings from a text. Through stylistics and the teaching of literature, the rules of language are exploited. After observation, linguistic patterns and changes to those patterns are recognized.

From a linguistic point of view in the classroom, the teacher can introduce through a stylistic analysis, the appreciation of different levels of language organization in the literary text. Teachers can also point out how words work and the nature of figurative language.

Stylistic interpretation involves a process of making equations or inferences about the linguistic forms and meanings in a literary context. Literary texts can also be compared on the basis of related or contrasting themes. Features of a text can also be compared through stylistics.

Mick Short states “that a stylistic examination of a text can provide a systematic and principled basis for grading texts for comparison or for further analysis. These texts can be progressively introduced to students on the basis of their linguistic accessibility” (Short, 1988, p. 172).

Widdowson writes that if stylistics is to make any valuable contribution to criticism, literature must be studied as a mode of communication, and in such a study, means and ends must be given equal attention and shown to be independent (Widdowson, 1975, p. 235). In teaching literature in the area of stylistics, the invitation for the recognition of how a text works as a whole is explored and probed into.

Stylistics and Translations

The use of translated materials can be introduced purposefully and imaginatively, into the language and literature classroom. In the classroom, using translated materials can help the teacher achieve optimal results if these materials are applied to relevant and suitable approaches, activities and exercises.

Our mother tongue shapes our way of thinking and to some extent our use of the other language (whether second or foreign language). The pronunciation, choice of words, tone, word order, etc. is influenced by one language on the other. When this influence is understood, the teacher can correct errors of habit or common errors that usually creep in unconsciously.

An appropriate material of translation is authentic and wide-ranging in scope. The learner can be brought in touch with the whole language of the target language to maximize the learner's power and range of expressions. This will in turn add to the learner's vocabulary.

Using translated material can invite speculation and discussion. Because there is rarely a “right answer”, the atmosphere of the classroom can be more relaxed. The text given by the teacher can be very short and yet this text can be exploited to serve both reading and discussion to cover the whole class period.

According to Alan Duff, using translated materials develops three qualities in learners (Duff, 1989, p. 7):

- i) *Flexibility- It trains the learner to search for, explore and choose words.*
- ii) *Accuracy- In the search for the most appropriate words, the learner strives with the best choice of words.*

iii) *Clarity- In his choice for words, the learner tries to convey what is meant.*

The teacher can select materials to illustrate particular areas or aspects and structure of the English language with which the learners have difficulty. Thus, the materials could be used to cater for the learner's needs and to cover the required syllabus. The materials could have illustrations of prepositions, articles, if-clauses, etc. These difficulties could be worked out while the learners come to see the link between language and usage in the target language through practice.

Practice in language learning must not mean giving assignments, marking all the errors in red and returning the marked assignments back to the learners. This way, the teacher will eventually demotivate the learners. Practice in language learning should mean giving the learners regular opportunities to compare and discuss their work with others and to respond to suggestions and tasks with an eagerness to learn and not fear of making flaws.

The teacher must be competent enough in the target language to deal with and handle the different classroom situations. Simple but interesting tasks can be given to the learners before actually working on the texts. This is designed to set the students thinking along specific lines and issues. For example, as a warm-up exercise, after a general reading of the text, the learners could be asked to suggest suitable titles for the text.

Activities involving the use of translated materials constantly mean making choices. The longer the learner stays neutral or undecided and without making a choice, the harder the learner finds it to make up his mind. The teacher realizes that the best responses, answers or solutions occur in the classroom after thinking is done and choices are made. Then, the discussions will function well in order to give the learners time for deeper and further reflection and a chance to change their minds to make even better choices.

Teachers are encouraged to look at the following items when evaluating and analyzing a piece of translated text through stylistics. The uppermost question in this writer's mind is: If I were a language teacher with learners whose mother tongue was not English, meaning teaching learners with English as their second language (ESL) or as their foreign language (EFL), which type of translated material would I choose? This writer would want to have the following in mind when making her selection.

- i) The materials must reliably reflect aspects of the English language (e.g., prepositions, conjunctions, etc.).
- ii) The materials which put across the meaning of the original text clearly and if not, that the teacher would be able to tell where the uncertainty lies and devise tasks and exercises to test whether the learners can detect it as well.
- iii) Whether any words used have underlying implications and that they are loaded with more meaning. These words can appear in the form of figures of speech.
- iv) Whether the dictionary meaning of a particular word would serve a suitable explanation as to whether the word is appropriately used.
- v) Whether the words used sound natural and smooth flowing. One of the most frequent criticisms of translated material is that it doesn't sound natural. This is because the translator's thoughts and choice of words are too strongly molded by the original text. This is termed as source language influence (Duff, 1989, p. 11). A good way of shaking off the

source language influence is to set aside the original text and exploit or work with the translated material on its own with the learners.

- vi) Whether in terms of form, the ordering of words and ideas match as closely to the original text as possible. Here, differences in the language structure often go through changes in the form and order of words. When there is doubt in the understanding of the text, words and phrases should be taken out and looked at closely with an expert to clear the doubts.
- vii) Whether the context of the text is clearly discernible. What is meant by context is the what, where and to whom. What one is writing and speaking about, where the situation occurs and to whom it is addressed.
- viii) Whether the register is discernible. What is meant by register is how. Whether tones can be detected or distinguished to be having formal or informal expressions, cold or warm, personal or impersonal. The intention of the speaker must be clearly understood through the register in terms of the tone of the speaker. Whether it is the intention of the speaker to persuade or dissuade, apologize or criticize.
- ix) The style and clarity of the translated material should not attempt to change the style of the original text. It must, however, attempt to put across the meaning as clearly as possible with the choice of words.
- x) Figures of speech and idiomatic expressions include similes, metaphors, symbols, proverbs and saying, jargon, slang and colloquialisms. The explanation of these expressions carries these questions: Is the original word retained in inverted commas? Can the original expression be explained better by a close equivalent? Is it clearer to use non-idiomatic language or plain prose in terms of understanding?

The Use of English Language Translations of the Meaning of the Quran

This writer is convinced that the English language translation of the meaning of the Quran is a good alternative to be used in the English language and literature classroom.

According to Islam, it is an important duty for every man, woman and child to read and understand the Quran according to his or her own capacity. Muslims regard the Quran as a living miracle, an open book challenging all humanity to see and prove for them. They see in the Quran an invitation from God to all human beings to use their intellect to reason out this truth, having been created and endowed with adequate intellectual faculties to do this.

The Quran contains messages that are directly stated and accessible to the reader's thought processes as well as messages which are conveyed by means of images which can appeal to the readers senses and stimulate his/her imagination of certain sensory experiences. Humanity is invited to "think" and "experience" as they try to understand the messages in the Quran. Muslim students, in particular, should be exposed to the study of Quranic concepts as early in their academic life as possible due to the abundance of concepts presented in the Quran. In this way, they will have a reasonable framework within which to grasp and understand at the time or at a later date, the varied concepts in the Quran with ease, which can help to elucidate the messages in the Quran.

Muslim educationists feel it is reasonable for Muslim students to try to make the Quran as much a part of their lives as possible. Thus, they would no doubt consider it a great achievement if the

Quran could be fitted to a large extent into any curriculum at Islamic educational institutions in any medium of study- including the curriculum of English language and Literature classes especially at Islamic educational institutions.

The basic justifications for using the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran in English language and Literature classes are the following. Firstly, the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran can be used most productively when teaching its content while exploiting its language. Secondly, the English language translations of the meanings of the Quran can be a source of encouragement for students especially at Islamic educational institutions because Muslims students are aware of the sacredness of the Quran. Because of their religious background, the students are motivated to relate to or imagine what is mentioned in the Quran. As Muslims, it is indeed beneficial for them to have an opportunity to study Quranic concepts for them to grow and develop spiritually. Also, Quran-based instruction would be a sure way of inculcating Islamic moral values in the learners and they can use these values as a yardstick for critiquing other texts. The third reason would be that of the possibility of introducing the literary aspects of the Quran to Muslim as well as non-Muslim students who may be attending Islamic institutions. A fourth reason would be that this is an effective way of making students more familiar with the Quran, which will enable them to use Quranic quotations effectively. This ability will be a great asset for anyone academically to prove and highlight his/her points in other coursework and socially especially in Islamic gatherings where topics of discussions, which are related to the Quran, are brought forth. Quranic quotations can make an impressive addition to one's rhetorical style.

It is suitable to teach Quranic concepts to students at the undergraduate level and beyond in particular because their maturity will allow for easier understanding and grasping of Quranic concepts and this would play an important role in enabling them to relate Quranic concepts to practical situations in their lives. They can also use these concepts in other relevant coursework. This is important because they are expected to express their viewpoints constructively in the near future in the real world and this may be their last chance to study Quranic concepts in an academic setting.

Conclusion

From the discussion in this paper, one can see that literary texts can be exploited in terms of language and content through stylistics. Stylistics can provide a way of mediating between two subjects, English language and Literature. This writer has also introduced the idea of using the English language translations of the meaning of the Quran as literary texts in the English language and Literature classroom. Stylistics is a way of analyzing literary texts using literary descriptions. The writer has indeed paved the way for the sensible possibility of analyzing the English language translated versions of the Quran using the stylistics approach in the Literature classroom.

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